

# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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## ISLAND IN THE SKY

A Complete Amazing Novel

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

IN THIS ISSUE:

VICTOR ROUSSEAU •

ROSS ROCKLYNNE •

FRANK BELKNAP LONG



# SCIENTIFICTION'S LEADING MAGAZINE

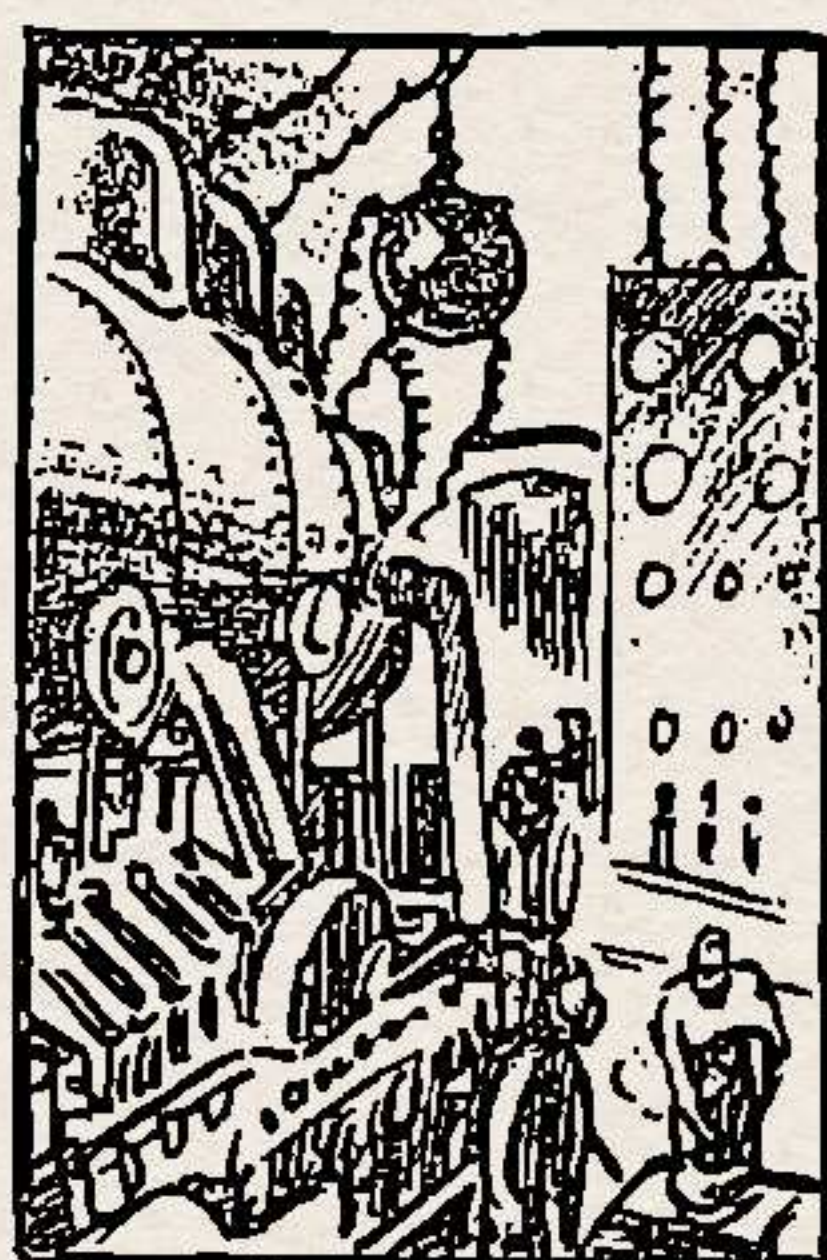
## THRILLING WONDER STORIES

*The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction*



Vol. XXI, No. 1  
October, 1941

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By **MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

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**ON THE COVER:** The cover painting by Rudolph Belarski depicts a scene from Manly Wade Wellman's Novel,  
**ISLAND IN THE SKY**

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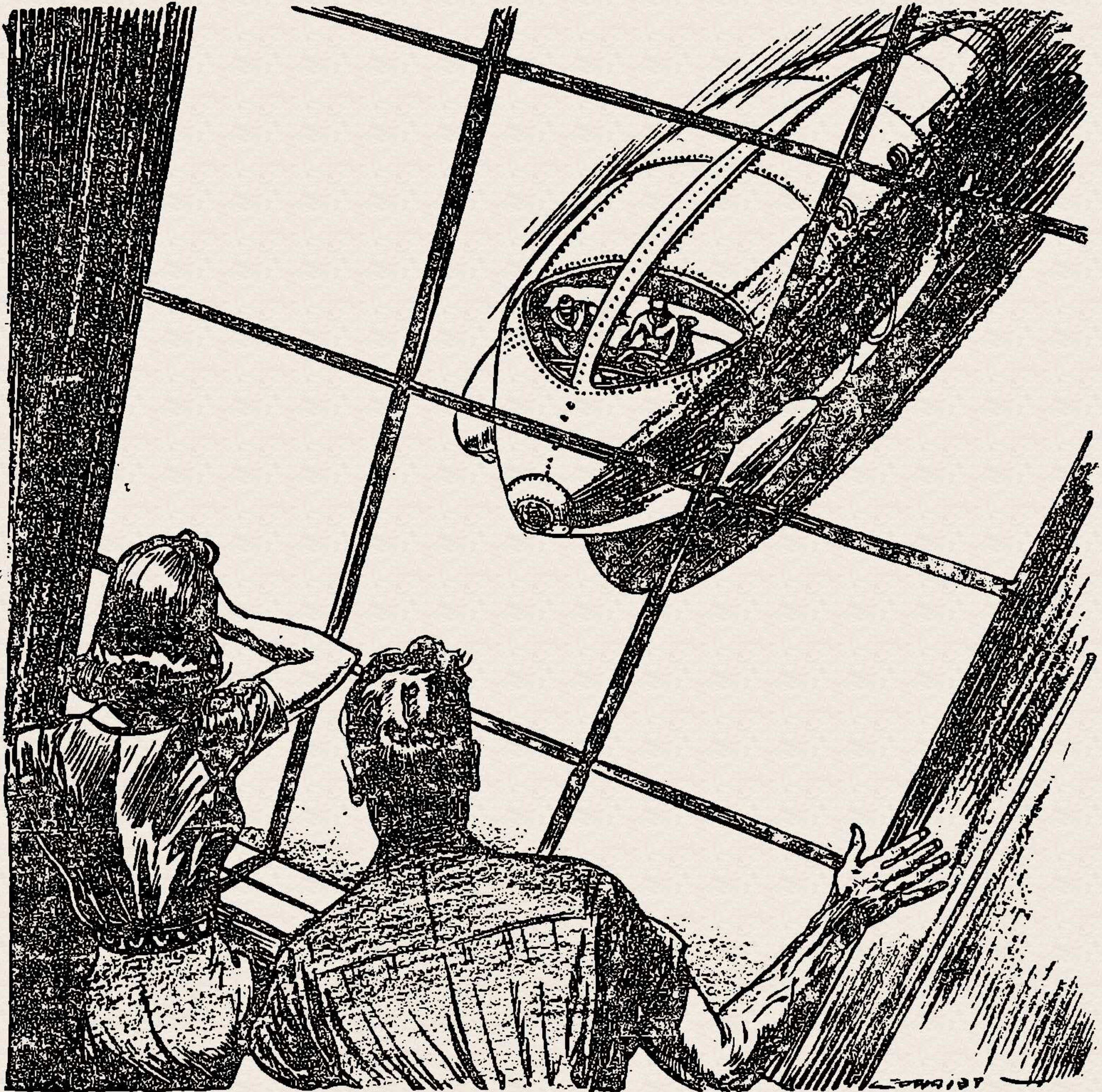
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# THE PURPLE BAT

By RICHARD WILSON

Author of "Murder from Mars," "Transitory Island," etc.



The motor roared as it shot across the grounds toward Janet and Dan

**Dan Ross Could Sell Warming Pads on Mercury's Day Side,  
But He Couldn't Talk Himself Out of Hot Water on Mars!**

**T**HE bronze-colored space boat, moored with mathematical precision a mile above Mars' surface, bore a startling array of impertinent signs, resembling a college student's room.

The other way to Niagara Falls,  
Piccadilly Circus  
North Pole and Points Tellurian

**NO RIDERS**

*Keep off the Brass*

Daniel Ross, sole Martian representative for the most spectacular and least salable miniature television set in the Solar System, circled the curiosity in his little rocket-flier. Squinting as the afternoon sunlight glinted off the ship's gleaming surface, he grinned. He had deliberately taken a line of Wright-Tomson wrist television sets, just to prove he was the best traveling salesman in the Universe. The fact that he would get a



quarter interest in the business if he saved it from bankruptcy was only an added inducement, of course.

"They must be lonesome in there, with all these warnings around," he muttered lightly, a trick he had picked up on the space-road's long, empty distances. "Put your foot firmly in the door, Ross. Smile and give 'em the old oil."

The traveling salesman cut the tiny ship's power, switched on the magnetic grapple. He stepped onto the little platform that was under the door, pressed a button labeled "Out to Lunch" and was surprised to find that the huge circular door was ajar. This was highly irregular. Such doors, on the space houses that had become the vogue during the past year, usually opened to him only after a great hissing of valves and rumbling of motors, if at all.

He pulled the door open and stepped inside, finding himself in a tiny air-lock. Beyond was a large and comfortably furnished room. At a desk in the corner sat a brown-haired girl, her back toward him.

"I beg your pardon," said Daniel Ross.

"Hello," replied the girl without turning her head. "We don't want any. Good-by."

Ross took this in stride. A super-salesman of the twenty-first century must be equal to almost any situation.

"If you'll give me the opportunity to demonstrate my product," he said, "I'm sure we'll both be well rewarded. I'm working—"

"Your way through prep school. I know. And don't forget the aged parents of whom you're the sole support. Your line is older than Mars."

**T**HE girl turned. She wore a blue dress, with shoes to match. Her full red lips were curved in a little smile. Ross drew himself up.

"I was about to say," he remarked coldly, "that I am working in conjunction with the Wright-Tomson Company to promote the sale of their wrist television sets. This new departure in radio has been made poss—"

The girl whirled, opened a desk drawer and flung papers into the air.

"At last!" she cried. "Now I can tell the Wright-Wrongson people what I think of them. Here." She offered him a watch-shaped object, holding it gingerly by a strap between thumb and forefinger. "Be careful, it might go off."

"Ah!" observed Ross. "Last year's model. But as good as new, I'll warrant, and still giving excellent service, eh?"

"Good as new, my foot!" said the girl acidly. "If I turn it on while I'm wearing it, my arm goes numb up to the elbow and little blue sparks hop off the ends of my fingernails."

"Shocking," murmured Ross. "Perhaps we can find out what's wrong with it."

He flicked over a tiny lever. The little screen of the instrument darkened. Microscopic, misty figures wavered, took form. A blast of music out of all proportion to the size of the receiver smote their ears. Ross tuned in another station.

"Another thrilling episode in the career of the Purple Bat." The announcer stepped back. His place on the color-reproducing screen was taken by a weird figure in a cape and eye-slitted hood of dark purple. Extending above the shoulders were huge purple wings.

"When we left you yesterday," the eerie figure was saying, "I was aboard the pirate ship, being pursued by three subhuman monsters armed with disintegrators. As I reached the end of the corridor—"

"Kid stuff," said Ross, reaching for the dial.

"Wait!" breathed the girl.

The voice had stopped abruptly, although the figure could still be seen on the screen. A crackling, mingled with low shrieks, came from the little machine, then died away. A new voice filled the air.

"Janet Vickers, listen carefully!"

The girl started, her eyes widening with fright. Ross looked quizzically at her. She nodded, bent to the tiny screen.

"I've called to inform you that I've kidnaped your father," the voice rasped.

Furtively Ross took a dial-studded



instrument board from his kit. He set it up, twisting the dials, trying to locate the origin of the phantom voice.

"Who are you?" demanded Janet. "What does all this mean?"

"It means— None of that, Mr. Ross!" There was a loud explosion as the instrument panel was blown to bits. The voice continued imperturbably. "I need your father for some profitable and utterly unlawful schemes of mine. Do nothing so foolish as informing the authorities, otherwise your father might meet with a fatal accident. As for my name, suppose you call me the Purple Bat. Melodramatic, perhaps, but more euphonious than my own. Set the dials of your clumsy space boat due north. I will take care of the rest. Don't get any heroic ideas, Mr. Ross. Stick to your peddling. Now, my friends, I return you to our regular program."

There was silence for a moment. Then the voice of the original Purple Bat broke in.

"Stand quietly, Gregory Masters, or I'll blast you from the face of Saturn—"

G r u n t i n g disgustedly, Ross switched off the set. Janet Vickers sat as if dazed, then got to her feet, kicking over the chair. Ross recoiled at the wild expression in her eyes.

"Oh, the beast!" she screamed. "The cowardly, sneaking dog!" You can't take my father away from me!"

**R**OSS ducked an inkwell that came his way. A heavy notebook knocked a large model tesseract from its stand. A paperweight flew through the air and shattered a picture on the wall.

Janet suddenly stopped weeping. She adjusted her hair and looked around to see Ross crawl from the shelter of an armchair. She was smiling.

"Frankly," said Ross, "I don't get it."

"An act," she explained. She walked to the picture that lay shattered on the floor. From among the pieces of broken glass she extracted a tiny silver box, smashed out of shape. She held it out to him.

"Now do you understand?" she asked.

"Wireless dictaphone?" he blurted, puzzled.

"Also television transmitter, made of radite, infinitesimally small. Its rays are capable of penetrating thirty inches of solid matter. The half-inch picture was a cinch."

"Talking to you is like reading an encyclopedia," marveled Ross. "In other words, old Bats could see and hear what was going on in this room till you smashed his gadget by throwing a fit."

"It was a paperweight," she corrected.

"It was a good idea," said Ross. "Well, do we go look for your father?"

"We? You're just a stranger, a traveling salesman."

"Yeah, but with an adventurous soul. Let's take my business ship."

"Should we?" she asked worriedly. "He said to use my big space boat."

"Mine's faster and more maneuverable."

She nodded thoughtfully. "First let me switch on the automatic ventilator." She jabbed a button on the wall. A second later a light above it glowed red, then faded. She smiled at him. "Let's go."

They got into his light, swift ship and he set the controls due north. Immediately they sped into the air. High over the squat, sprawling but well constructed buildings of the capital of the state of Tuloni-Lugana. They headed involuntarily for the open, sandy country known as the Wastes of Odern, which stretched almost immeasurably between them and the next big city, Iopa.

Half an hour later Janet nudged him in the ribs and pointed ahead. There was a rambling series of buildings, one standing out among the others, all surrounded by a high gray wall. Ross tried to nod. Instead his head snapped back as the little two-seater tossed about crazily amid a lot of loud explosions.

"Are we being shot at?" Janet cried.

"No," Ross declared sadly as the ship began to glide silently toward the ground. "Motor trouble. I can't imagine why. She's just been overhauled."



"How about the emergency propeller?"

"That's on the blink, too. Hold tight. We'll be down before you know it."

"That's what I'm afraid of," she quavered.

Ross pulled up the ship's nose. The wheels touched the ground, rolled to a stop a quarter-mile from the settlement. As the two stepped out of the ship, a gate in the wall opened. A powerful, bullet-nosed diesel car sped toward them.

THREE people emerged from the car. One was a slight man with watery blue eyes. His black hair was sparse, plastered flat on his skull. A steel-colored shirt, open at the neck, matched his shorts. A Raevak gun was holstered at his thigh.

The second was a grotesque figure about four feet tall. He had a tetrahedral head, blinking shoe-button eyes, a wide single-nostriled nose. An oval mouth that would not close completely showed gleaming white teeth. He had an egg-shaped, hair-covered body, with powerful legs. Naturally accustomed to traveling on four legs, this specimen seemed to be taking pains to walk erect. He moved awkwardly, ill at ease.

The third was a tall man in his late forties. Dressed like his human companion, but unarmed, he wore blue-lensed glasses that seemed to possess a hypnotic quality. Both Ross and Janet were unable to discern any part of his face. Their eyes were attracted involuntarily to the blue spectacles, though they could look elsewhere without difficulty.

"Welcome to Ostend's Outpost," the tall man said, leaning forward nearsightedly. His voice was brittle, metallic. "To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"Motor trouble," said Ross. "If we could borrow a mechanic—"

"Of course. Permit us to introduce ourselves. This is Francis Spork, my colleague. I am Leo Ostend. This is Number Six, an experimental Martian—a Parrag, or artificial mutant. The other five were unsuccessful. Greet the folks, Six."

The Martian looked at him with

frightened eyes. He turned to the newcomers, his voice rumbling thickly.

"How . . . do."

"A Martian?" gasped Ross. "I thought all native Martians were immense green things with spiny hair, practically extinct."

"You're thinking of the lamiae, or the greenies," explained Ostend. "They're practically nonexistent today. They were cleaned up about fifty years ago by the Tellurian army of maintenance. Six is of another species."

"How do," the little Parrag insisted.

"How do you do," said Ross politely. "This is Miss Janet Vickers. My name is Daniel Ross."

"Happy to know you." The owner of the blue spectacles bowed. "Suppose we go inside."

The car pulled up in front of a large, two-story stone building, one of many inside the wall. Ostend conducted his guests into the building. The three found themselves in a room that might have been a hotel lobby.

"Please make yourselves at home," urged their host. "You will find here magazines, cigarettes and a television set. I'll go find my mechanic."

Janet turned to the System's best traveling salesman.

"Nice fellow, Ostend—on the surface."

"Bit eccentric, though. Why a town out here? Did you notice his eyes?"

"No," replied Janet. "I can't remember his face at all. Do you think he's the bird we're after?"

"He's a fine-looking suspect," said Ross.

"Did you notice that gigantic building we passed?"

"Notice?" he blurted. "Didn't that fellow Spork almost ram it? Looked like a hangar."

"Uh-huh. Assuming that Ostend is our quarry, what are we going to do about it? We might spend the night here, but if he's the fellow we're after, I hardly think he'd be anxious to have any guests poking their noses into his business."

Ostend reappeared, waving a cigarette holder.

"Unfortunately," he announced,



"your ship won't be ready as soon as I'd expected. My mechanic tells me that never has he seen a motor in such condition. It's a mass of rust!"

**O**STEND lighted a cigarette. It was an eerie sight. The holder, in the circle of bluish radiance that emanated from the spectacles, became invisible. Only the cigarette was to be seen, apparently floating in the air.

"Must you do that?" cried Janet, looking away.

"Sorry," apologized Ostend. He threw away the cigarette, pocketed the holder. "Sometimes I forget. You see, my eyes were injured in an explosion years ago. As a result I am nearly blind. The glass of these spectacles is the only kind powerful enough to enable me to see at all, so I am forced to accept its other properties." Ostend bowed. "Now, since your ship cannot possibly be in running condition until tomorrow, I am pleased to offer you accommodations for the night."

They walked over sandy ground toward another stone building. The Martian night was falling. Lights glowed over the Outpost. Ostend rolled back a folding door. The ground floor, scattered with sawdust and excelsior, served as a warehouse. Crates and boxes were piled about, some empty, some still unopened.

Their rooms upstairs were comfortable and tastefully furnished, the windows overlooking an enclosed court. Ostend begged to be excused, promising to send supper up shortly.

"What do you make of that mechanic's diagnosis?" asked Ross. "How could my ship's motor be a mass of rust?"

"Maybe Ostend shot us down with a rust ray. The Purple Bat told us to take my boat. He might have got angry at being disobeyed and shot us down, at the same time wrecking the motor."

Ross swallowed hard. His respect for the enemy suddenly grew overwhelming.

Their doors were locked from the outside. They discovered that when Six left, after bringing their supper. They had tried to pump the Parrag

about Ostend, but were unsuccessful. If Six knew anything, he wasn't talking.

They peered out the window. They were only on the second floor yet, the drop to the stone court would be risky. Ross went first. He hung by his hands a second, then dropped. Though he landed on the balls of his feet, the jar was distinctly unpleasant.

He motioned Janet to be patient a moment and disappeared through a doorway. He returned with his arms full of excelsior, which he piled under the window. Janet jumped, landing lightly.

"Where now?" she asked.

"There ought to be something interesting in that granddaddy of all hangars."

Cautiously they entered the hangar through a door that was unlocked. They stood amazed for a moment after entering, staring upward. Illuminated by a score of dim lights high on the ceiling were a hundred or more three-man rocket fighters. They were standing on the floor, or supported by hooks from the ceiling. Presumably they could be lowered to the floor, ready to dart out on their mission of death when the others were out of the way.

"Quite an armada," breathed Janet. "What's he going to do with it?"

Rose shrugged. "Maybe he's incorporated as a fighter factory."

"Very logical. I suppose manufacturers' trademarks always go on their ships in letters a foot high?"

She pointed at the side of the nearest craft. Ross made out the words "Leo I" and a coat-of-arms of outré design. The insignia was repeated on each of the other ships.

"Now that you mention it," said Ross, "it does look a bit suspicious."

They made their way to the opposite side of the enclosure. A hundred feet inward was another, smaller wall, from behind which came noise and light. Soon they could distinguish the tramp of marching feet, strangely muffled, a shrill voice giving orders, an occasional bark of command from a voice they suspected was Ostend's.

They peered through an opening in the rock wall. A fantastic scene met their eyes. Batteries of searchlights

[Turn to page 114]



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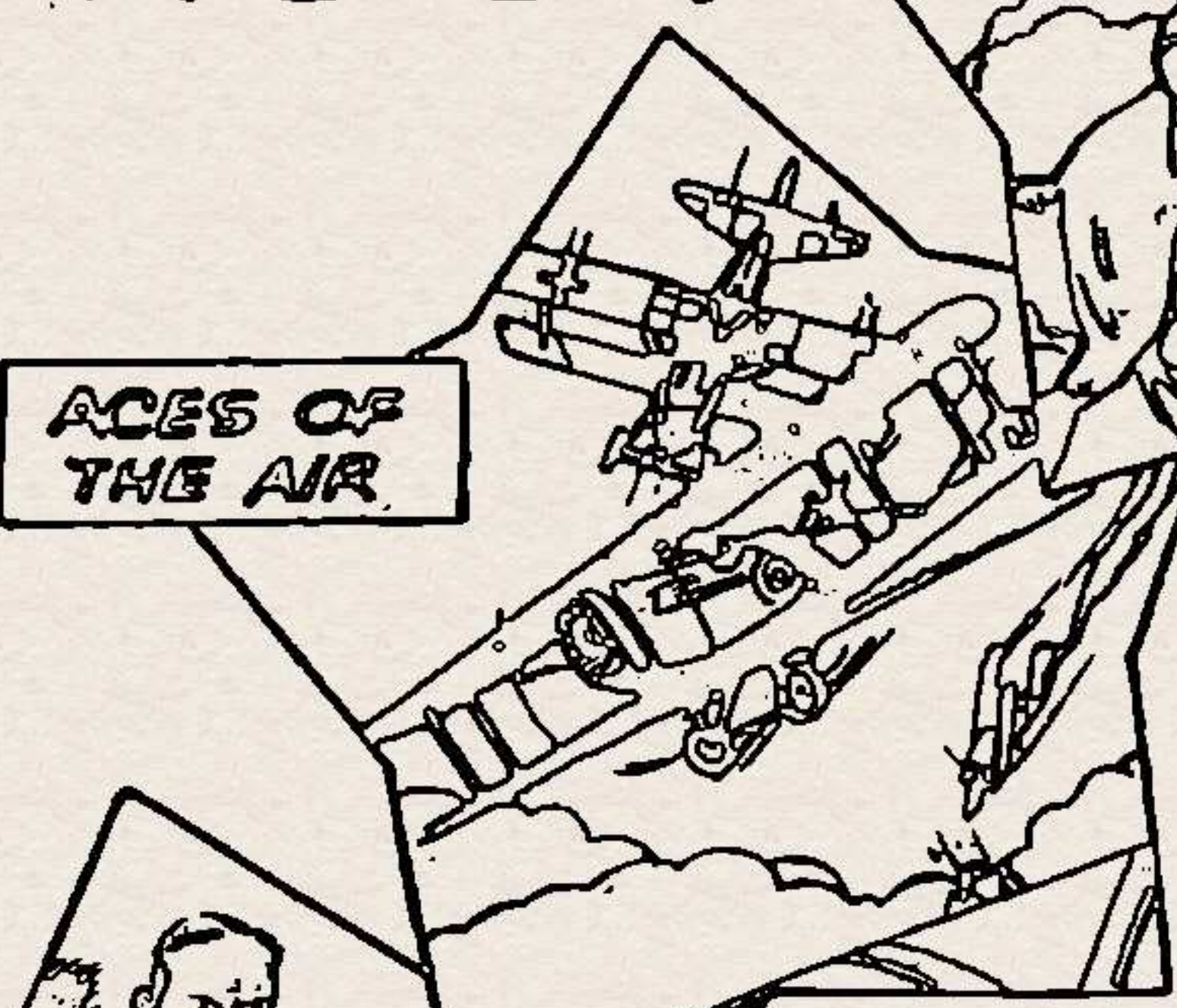
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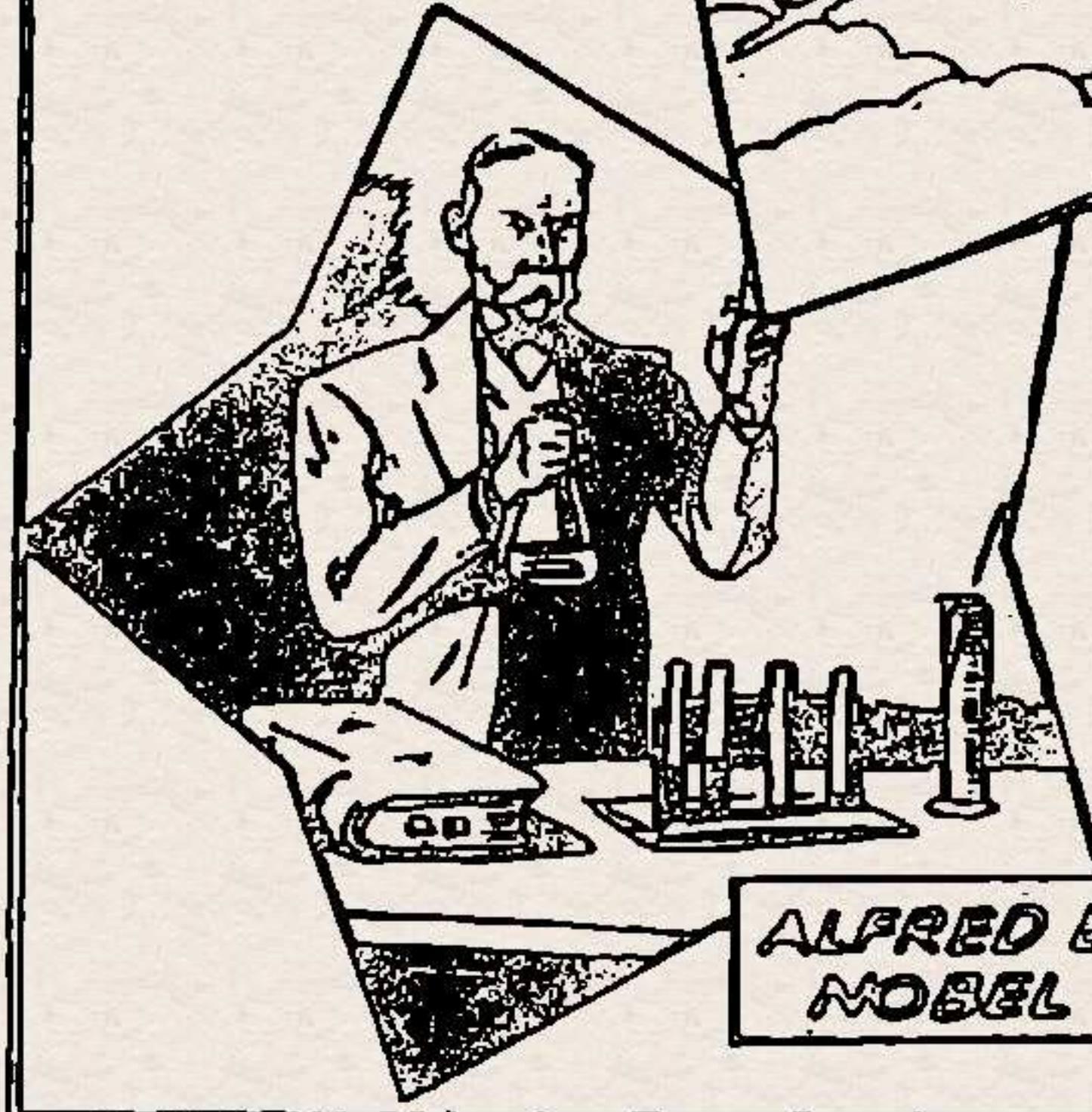
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BOONE



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atop the walls lighted the enclosure as if it were day. Two hundred Martians, carrying Raevak rifles, were going through the intricate maneuvers of military drill. Giving orders in his native tongue was Six, the Parrag who had brought their supper.

**A** THRONELIKE chair bore Leo Ostend, self-termed monarch of Ostend's Outpost. Now and again he beckoned to Six, who hurried over and listened attentively, then gave new orders to his troops. On the wall above Ostend were the first other Tellurians Janet and Ross had seen. There were half a dozen directly under the searchlights, each squatting behind a Raevak rapid-fire. Evidently Ostend was taking no chances of revolt in his army.

A Sonoprobe, a massive tangle of outstretched steel ears, strained electrically to catch the sound of aircraft. The operator, his back toward them, a headpiece down over his ears, might have been either a Martian or a Tellurian. As they watched, the operator raised a hand. Immediately every light in Ostend's Outpost went out. Before their eyes could readjust themselves to the darkness, one blinding searchlight stabbed out. Ross and Janet were caught in its beam.

Ostend's voice barked orders in the tongue Six had spoken. A handful of Parrag soldiers stepped out of the darkness, surrounded the two, threatened them with rifles. Urged along the wall and through an archway, Janet and Ross were brought before Ostend. The other searchlight snapped on. Spork smiled evilly and rested his hand on the holstered gun.

"So," said Ostend, peering at them near-sightedly, "you couldn't wait until tomorrow to make a tour of inspection. That is unfortunate. Since your curiosity is so acute, I have no recourse but to satisfy it. First tell me what you already know."

"Not much," replied Ross, looking bitterly at his captor. "We know that you've made slaves of the Parrags. We've seen your hangar. No doubt with your planes and Parrags you plan to overthrow the government of Tuloni—"

"With the help of my father, Monroc Vickers," broke in Janet, "which you won't get."

"So you know that, too, eh? Worthy opponents, I must admit."

"You're not so badly equipped, yourself," Ross said ironically, glancing at the men behind the rapid-fires and the bewildered but armed Parrags.

Ostend barked an order. Their Parrag captors dropped back.

"I won't interrupt your tour," continued Ostend. "Just to be sure you don't miss anything, I'll accompany you. So will Francis, if you don't mind. I find him invaluable at times."

Spork grinned, patted his gun and followed Ostend as he led the way across the enclosure. At Ostend's command, the Parrags broke ranks and scurried off.

"I am happy to report," said Ostend, "that your father is in the best of health. You shall see for yourself in a moment. Since you know so much already, it will do no harm to tell you the rest. There is about to be a change of power in Tuloni. I believe that a benevolent dictator will be more acceptable to the masses than the so-called democratic but wholly corrupt leaders now in office. It is therefore my intention to take over the government in the near future. Francis will be my chief aide. Don't you think he'll make a good governor, Mr. Ross?"

"Lovely," replied Ross, looking distastefully at Spork. "Just lovely."

"I have been putting my plans into action at a great rate. My first step was to hush up my discovery of the Parrags. Few people outside scientific circles have heard of them and no one seemed to mind when I assumed responsibility for them. The Parrags are a highly developed race of near-human animals. Six, whom you have met, is the best-developed among them. I wasted much valuable time on his five antecedents, who were hopelessly stupid. Six, however, is the perfect pupil."

Ostend's voice dropped to a whisper.

"He is as intelligent, I dare say, as Francis. So far as I know, he speaks more English. Would you be-



lieve that in all the years I've known Francis, I doubt if he's spoken a hundred words? About eighty of these were 'yes' and 'no'."

"You don't tell me," remarked Ross.

"I do," Ostend went on confidentially. "I met Francis in Iopa a good many years ago, at a bar. Of course the place is quite respectable now—"

"I hate to be a wet blanket, boys," broke in Janet, "but aren't you straying from the topic? You were telling us about your plan of conquest, Mr. Ostend."

"So I was. Let me see. I made a very encouraging discovery about that time. I found the Parrags lived in a crystal mine. Do you know what that means?"

"Crystals—water," said Janet. "Water—on Mars—money. Money—power. Is that it?"

"You have the analytical mind, Miss Vickers. I am nominal chairman of the board of Martian Life, Inc. So, with funds coming in from every part of the globe, it was only a matter of time before I built a rather formidable army, constructing my own ships and guns here at the Outpost. My only difficulty lay in getting munitions. That provided a nearly insurmountable barrier, inasmuch as all Martian munitions factories are government-owned. A private consumer cannot purchase any of their supply without undergoing the most searching investigation.

"In my position you can understand that an investigation of our Outpost would be highly undesirable. Therefore things looked rather black, until your father happened to stumble upon Vixon. Incidentally Vixon is a very appropriate name for the explosive. Did you name it, Miss Vickers, or was it named after you?"

"That's quite clever, Mr. Ostend," said Janet patronizingly.

"Thank you. I have learned through the use of a mechanical spy or two that Vixon is smokeless, highly explosive and amazingly inexpensive to manufacture. Its production, I understand, is simplicity itself. I have everything I need, except the formula. Vickers is a very cautious man. He doesn't write things down on paper.

He keeps them in his head, where I can't get at them without a lot of bother. Hence I resorted to abduction."

**T**HEY had arrived at a building made, as was everything in the town except the hangar, of gray stone.

"This is your father's house," said Ostend to Janet. "Since his only recreation is working in his laboratory, I have placed at his disposal a completely equipped one. I thought he'd go ahead with his experiments—not on the explosives, for I didn't expect that much—perhaps evolving something that might prove useful to me in a field other than that of revolution.

"But your father is cleverer still. He spends all his time in elementary chemical experiments. He seems to be perfectly happy changing red litmus paper to blue, breaking down my expensive water to its component parts, and so on."

Ostend led them into the building. A faint but unpleasant odor, smote their nostrils.

"What's that?" Janet asked.

Ostend laughed. "Another of your father's experiments. When he first arrived, I used to visit him and try to bribe him into sharing his secret with me. He refused. Evidently he became annoyed at my visits, because the next time I came he poured a quart of sulphuric acid into a pot of zinc. He'd provided himself with a gas-mask, but I hadn't. The place hasn't been the same since."

"Good old Dad," approved Janet.

"Another time he set up a miniature distillery. You'll find dozens of bottles lining the laboratory shelves, full of alcoholic distillate. Number Four, one of my Parrag failures, helped himself to some. He ran wild, smashing considerable machinery." Ostend chuckled. "We had to shoot him. Well, enough of this gay banter. This is the only room in the house denied your father. I use it for observation. When I flick a switch, this mirror becomes transparent in only one direction. There. Your father is perfectly safe and still playing, I see."

They saw a white-haired, pleasantly round man of fifty, attired in a white



smock. He was engaged in watching tiny sodium-powered boats boil around and around in a trough of water.

"That's Dad," said Janet. "Always clowning."

Ostend's voice hardened. "The farce is over. Let the tragedy begin. Francis!"

Spork drew his Raevak pistol, leveled it at the girl.

"Don't do anything heroic while I'm tying you, Mr. Ross. Someone might die."

Ross wisely did nothing that might further endanger the girl's life. When the traveling salesman had been securely tied, Ostend pressed the switch, making the glass transparent in both directions. The man in the white smock looked up and gave a start of surprise.

"Janet!" he cried. "What are you doing here?"

"Being held hostage, Dad," quavered the girl, for the first time seeming to realize that she was in danger.

"Now, Professor," warned Ostend, "unless you give me the formula I want, your daughter dies. That, I think, would be pretty terrible."

"So would be deaths of thousands of innocent people. I can guess how you'd use the formula, once it was in your hands."

"Don't give it to him, Dad," Janet insisted. "Never mind me."

"Professor!" Ross broke in. "Don't listen to her. You couldn't watch your daughter die. I couldn't anyhow."

Vickers looked at each of them in turn.

"All right, Ostend," he sighed. "Give me half an hour to put the formula on paper."

"Fine." Ostend beamed as he untied Ross. "Come, children, back to jail. This time it will be a real one."

The cell-block was dark, below ground and windowless. Ross nervously paced his cell, thinking furiously but futilely. A welt on his forehead testified that he had not been incarcerated without a struggle. In the adjoining cell, Janet sat moodily on a cot and stared unseeingly at the floor. They had been there almost two hours.

Ross ceased his pacing when he heard a pad of footsteps. The sound came from the right. Spork, who had been stationed on guard, was to their left. A Parrag appeared in the dimly lit corridor.

"Six!" breathed Janet and Ross in unison.

The little Martian motioned them to silence. He produced a key, unlocked their doors, handed Ross a Raevak pistol.

"Follow me. Don't make any noise."

The Earth people silently followed the Martian down the corridor, their minds full of unspoken questions. They climbed to the first floor of the building.

"There is only one door," said Six. "Spork is guarding it. He'll have to be overcome first. This way."

A dark room led into a hall. At the end of it Spork could be seen, his back toward them, sitting in a chair tilted against the wall. Ross crept on, his gun ready. Spork looked up as Ross' shoe scuffed against the hard floor.

"Hey!" he shouted, springing to his feet.

"Shut up!" gritted Ross.

He slammed a hard right to the jaw. Spork folded up with a groan.

**F**IVE hundred feet away was the building where Professor Vickers was being held prisoner. They hurried toward it, crouching, taking advantage of every shadow. Through a window Ross saw Vickers and Ostend talking.

They burst in. Ostend looked around to find himself covered by three guns. If he was surprised, he didn't show it. He bowed ironically.

"You people do pop up, don't you? And you, Six. Why should you aim a gun at me? Surely you owe me an explanation, if nothing else."

"You shall have your explanation," declared the Parrag. "Before you came, my people were happy. You decided to teach us man's culture, never thinking we had our own. Having been a peace-loving folk for centuries, my people were content to let matters take their course, as long as you threatened us no harm. We didn't mind working in your crystal mine."



We were decently treated there. But when this talk of war began, we became uneasy.

"It's not our wish to wage war on innocent people to pave the way to kingship for you, nor is it our way to let wrong go unpunished. When you shot Vicla, whom you facetiously called Number Four, my people became angry. It was only with difficulty that I persuaded them to bide their time. Now, I think, the time has come."

Ostend's face, hidden behind the blue haze of his spectacles, could betray no visible amazement at the miraculous transformation of a dull, half-human creature to one intelligent and well spoken. His surprise could be heard in his voice, however.

"What brought about this change in you, Six?"

"My name is Orro," said the Martian. He stood straight, princely. There was pride in his eyes. "Before you came, I was a leader of my people. A council of the elders decided that since you were to train us in the ways of human beings at no cost to us save loss of dignity, we would fall in with your plan. When you further decided to pass out higher educations to a few of us, we took full advantage of it. While you thought we were puzzling over elementary grammar, though, we were learning from Euclid, Caesar, Shakespeare."

"Yes?" snarled a voice behind them. "Drop 'em."

Spork stood triumphantly holding a Raevak. With no choice but to obey, Ross, Janet and Orro dropped their guns.

"Now," said Ostend amiably, "where were we? As I was telling your father, Miss Vickers, we are not easily fooled. The professor thought that by giving us only half the formula, we wouldn't be able to tell the difference long enough for something to intervene. But my able technicians weren't misled." Ostend held out his hand to Professor Vickers. "The rest, please."

The professor looked at him sourly.

"You'll never get it from me, Ostend."

"Because he doesn't know it,"

taunted Janet. "Dad and I worked on that problem together. We each memorized half the formula, then destroyed the notes. Only I can help you now, Leo the First—and I won't!"

"Janet," murmured Dan sadly.

"So," purred Ostend, "you have the rest. Give it to me!"

"You," said Janet coolly; "know where you can go."

"If you don't," replied Ostend, "I shall be forced to have Francis shoot your beloved father. None of us would like that."

"Go ahead and shoot!" cried Janet, laughing wildly. "Go ahead!"

Spork's mouth twisted. His finger tightened on the trigger.

"Wait," Ostend ordered.

He was too late. A sharp report, a wisp of smoke came from the Raevak in Spork's hand. Vickers stiffened, a look of surprise on his face. Then he pitched to the floor.

**ROSS** leaped. Spork swung his gun around, but not in time. While they struggled for one gun, Ostend stooped to recover another from the floor. But Orro, the Parrag, was quicker. Ostend felt himself grabbed by the back of the neck and thrown to the floor. Orro gathered up the Raevaks.

Ostend shrieked. Spork glanced around. Off guard, he was caught on the side of the jaw by Dan's crashing fist. He slumped down, unconscious.

"This is getting monotonous," said Ross.

He looked down to see Ostend groveling blindly on the floor, his glasses shattered into countless fragments of blue. The face, revealed for the first time, was a mass of hideous scar tissue. Janet looked away, suddenly faint. Ross gritted his teeth, revolted by her callousness. She seemed to be more upset by Ostend's appearance than by the death of her father.

"Dan!" she cried. "Don't act like that. I can explain."

But there was no time for explanations. Ostend, in his gropings, had found what he was searching for. His fingers pressed an alarm button. A siren moaned, then screamed. Men

(Continued on page 126)



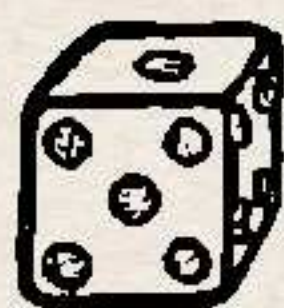


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## THE PURPLE BAT

*(Continued from page 117)*

ran across the starlit grounds toward the house. Ross muttered a curse, fired a shot over their heads. They turned back, took cover in a building a hundred yards away.

"Get down!" shouted Ross over the siren howl. He switched off the light. "There'll be fireworks in a minute."

He crouched below a window-sill, the gun he had taken from Spork ready to fire. Orro handed Janet a gun. They took up positions at the other windows. There was silence in the room. Suddenly a window shattered, showering Ross with broken glass. He took careful aim and squeezed the trigger. One of Ostend's men, who had unwisely shown himself, fell.

A rapid-fire burst from the darkness spent itself harmlessly on the side of the house. Ostend's men were keeping carefully under cover. Scattered shots rang out occasionally. The guns of the besieged were silent. They were holding their fire until they could see something to shoot at.

Suddenly a score of men dashed across the grounds, covered from the rear by rapid-fire guns. The three returned the fire, taking careful aim and shooting deliberately. When seven of the attackers had fallen, the rest broke and scattered.

Orro whispered something in Ross' ear. The traveling salesman nodded. The Parrag left one of his guns with Ross and scurried from the room.

"Where's he going?" asked Janet.

"Reinforcements," grunted Ross, squinting as he pumped a bullet in the direction of an Outpostian who had shown himself.

Ostend, having sounded the alarm, made no further attempt at freedom. He sat huddled in a corner, all his spirit gone. Spork had come to and Ross was tying him. There was a tense silence. Each side seemed to be waiting for the other to start something.

Ross still felt numb. How could she be so callous? The fact that her father's corpse was still lying in the room didn't seem to bother her.

"Dan! Look!"

He peered out a window. Ostend's men had brought up the diesel car.



The motor roared as it shot across the grounds toward them.

"It's coming straight at us!" screamed Janet. "It's going to ram us!"

"Look over there."

Ross pointed. Around a corner of the building, where Ostend's men had taken cover, there loomed a horde of Parrags. As they watched, those in the fore dropped flat and fired at the speeding car. The car swerved crazily as the driver fell over the wheel, dead. It crashed into a pile of rock.

The rest of Ostend's men saw the army of Parrags. They threw down their weapons in a panic, held up their hands. At that moment a squadron of planes with the insignia of the Tulonian Guard glinting in the starshine appeared above the Outpost.

"Cops!" exclaimed Ross. "How did they get here?"

"They flew," explained Janet.

They ran from the house. The planes landed. Out of the first stepped a white-haired man who rushed toward Janet.

"Dad!" she cried, darting into his arms.

"Are you all right, my dear?" he asked, kissing her.

"Fine, Dad. I want you to meet Daniel Ross. You probably know him pretty well by now."

Dan stared in open-mouthed amazement at the exact double of the man lying dead on the floor in the house. Then he impolitely wandered off to stare dazedly in at the window. Janet laughed, caught him by the arm.

"This is my father," she said.

"How do you do," Dan said absently. "But who's the corpse in the parlor?"

The real Professor Vickers smiled.

"Just a robot," he said. "He was a hobby of mine. He gave my interviews to reporters, or answered the door when salesmen called." He chuckled. "The blank stare I gave him on those occasions soon scared away unwanted visitors."

"Sh-h, Dad," whispered Janet. "Dan's a salesman."

"That's all right, sir," Ross said. "Please excuse me if I'm a little bewildered. Things have been happening so fast lately that I haven't been

[Turn page]



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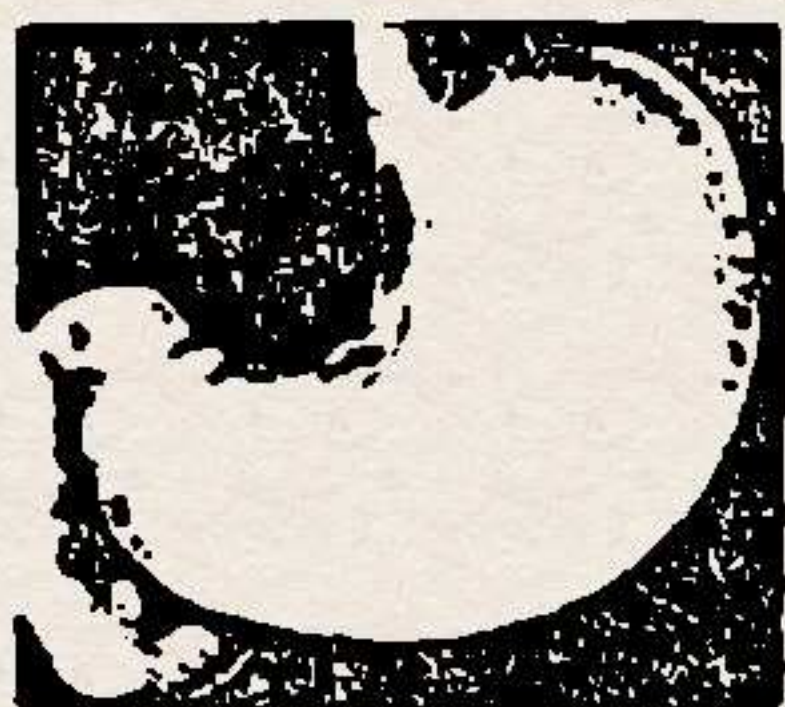


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quite able to catch up with them."

"You ask, we'll answer," suggested Janet.

"All right. How was your fa—the robot, I mean—able to carry on intelligent conversations, perform experiments, and so forth? He was so dog-gone real! Ostend's no fool. Why didn't he discover the fraud?"

"The robot was my hobby," replied Vickers. "Since every man works harder at his hobby than his job, I went to town on my duplicate. He was radio-television controlled. I literally saw through his eyes. At first it was fun, running Ostend ragged. He was the only one who saw the robot at close range, but the fact that he's almost blind kept him from finding that he'd kidnaped an automaton. But when Janet appeared on the scene, it was difficult to call the police and keep my eyes glued to the control box. It was a relief when I died."

"And you knew it was a robot all the time?" Dan asked Janet.

"Sure," she answered casually.

"Then why risk your life—not to mention mine—in a cockeyed attempt to save a lot of wiring and plastic?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time."

Dan's hands clenched and he gritted his teeth.

"I ought to wring your neck!"

"Sometimes," agreed Vickers, "I feel that way myself."

"I have just one more question," Dan said. "When Ostend butted in on that Purple Bat program, how did you know he had the robot and not your father?"

"Remember the ventilating system you saw me switch on just before we left?" Janet asked. "Well, it wasn't a ventilating system at all. It was a signal to Dad's lab. The answering signal meant he was there."

"Besides," Vickers added, "I had left Janet ten minutes before, when I saw you hovering around in your two-seater."

"He said: 'If that's a salesman, tell him to go to blazes'," quoted Janet.

Ross laughed. "I hope you've changed your mind about salesmen. I have a hunch I'll be calling pretty often—and not to sell wrist television sets, either."

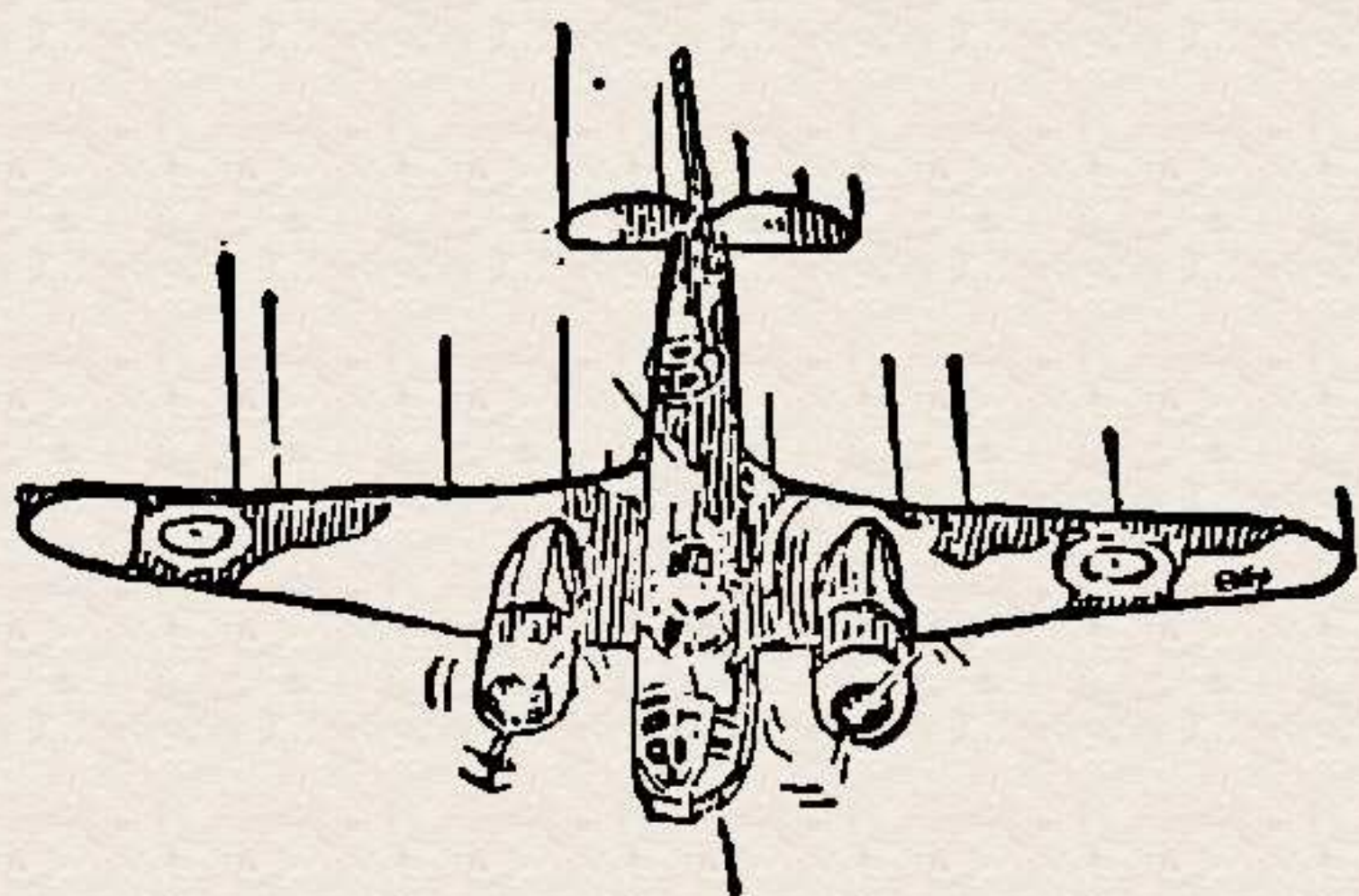


"Speaking of that, my boy," said Vickers professorially, "I spent a few days tinkering with that unsalable device of yours. Like most beginners, your company tried to drive out competition by offering the impossible. The fuel battery is much too powerful, causing considerable shock to the user. If you will substitute a smaller fuel battery, the result will be much more satisfactory."

"Well, so that's it, eh?" Ross smiled with anticipation, glancing at Janet's slim ring-finger. "You don't know it, but you've just sold me a partnership in a rising young corporation, Professor, and I think you're going to be stuck with a very close relative soon."

Janet and her father pretended not to understand, but Ross caught the wink that passed between them when they thought he wasn't looking.

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